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SUBJECT: GOR CLAMPS DOWN ON OTHER RUSSIA; KASPAROV
SENTENCED TO FIVE DAYS IN JAIL

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On November 24, following a peaceful, sanctioned meeting in central Moscow, about eighty of an estimated two thousand Other Russia/SPS demonstrators attempted to march to the Central Election Commission in defiance of a ban by city authorities. In the melee that followed, police and special forces troops briefly detained up to forty of the activists, and arrested Other Russia leader Garry Kasparov. Kasparov was denied access to counsel until just before the brief November 24 hearing that saw him sentenced to five days detention for refusing to obey authorities and for organizing an illegal activity. The Ambassador will raise concerns over the GOR reaction to the demonstration with acting Foreign Minister Denisov this evening. End summary.

Illegal March Stopped

¶2. (SBU) A sanctioned November 24 meeting in central Moscow sponsored by Other Russia was attended by about two thousand demonstrators and addressed by Other Russia's Garry Kasparov, the Union of Right Forces' (SPS) Boris Nemtsov, the outlawed National Bolshevik Party's Eduard Limonov, and others. Other Russia estimated attendance at about three thousand, while Moscow city authorities pegged it at one thousand, and Embassy representative split the difference at two thousand. Police presence at the meeting was moderate.

¶3. (SBU) After the conclusion of the meeting, about eighty of the demonstrators attempted to march toward the Central Election Commission, where they hoped to deliver a petition. The police acted aggressively to prevent the march, as the permit given to Other Russia sanctioned a meeting only. In the melee that followed, police detained forty people, who had broken through a thin police barricade, crossed the busy Garden Ring Road, then ran down a side street in the direction of the CEC. Among those brought into custody were Kasparov, human rights activist and SPS Moscow representative Maria Gaidar, National Bolshevik Party head Eduard Limonov, the head of the NGO "For Human Rights" Lev Ponomarev and Yabloko Party youth leader Ilya Yashin. During the confusion, a small group led by the Other Russia's Moscow representatives Marina Litvinovich, delivered a petition to the duty officer at the Central Election Commission, who promised to pass it to the appropriate office when the CEC opened for business on November 26.

¶4. (SBU) Kasparov was quickly sentenced to five days imprisonment for refusing to obey authorities and for organizing an illegal activity. (Note: the speed with which justice was rendered was unusual. The judge apparently reversed her earlier decision to reconvene on November 26 and delivered her verdict on the evening of November 24.) Kasparov and others have complained that the police and the judicial system violated their rights after their arrest.

Kasparov's attorney has claimed that he was not given access to Kasparov until five minutes before his quickly arranged hearing on November 24 and not permitted to present evidence. Of the remaining 39, nine were immediately released and thirty were told to report to court on Monday, November 26.

Marches Face Problems Elsewhere

15. (SBU) Attempts to hold un-sanctioned marches in Nizhniy Novgorod on November 24 and in St. Petersburg on November 25 (septel) encountered similar resistance from the police. Sources in Nizhniy Novgorod report that dozens of Other Russia and SPS demonstrators defied a decision by city authorities --who had offered other venues-- and gathered in downtown Gorkiy Square, where they were detained by police. Some of the would-be demonstrators were reportedly beaten and denied access to legal counsel. In addition, a television crew from Moscow-based REN-TV was reportedly kidnapped from its hotel in Nazran by men wearing special police uniforms and warned against trying to film a protest on November 24 against human rights abuses there (septel).

SPS's Presence Swells Other Russia Ranks

16. (SBU) The November 24 Moscow rally marked the first time that SPS had joined Kasparov's group. Their members swelled Other Russia's generally more paltry ranks and white flags of SPS's Moscow organization outnumbered those of other participating. Many of the speakers led the crowd in cheering for a "Russia Without Putin." Nemtsov even tried to capitalize on the Russian national soccer team's recent near-miss qualification in the next round of the 2008 European Cup tournament by evoking a popular chant used at

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those matches.

17. (SBU) Nemtsov told the media that the arrest of SPS activists was illegal and that the party would challenge it in the local courts. Nemtsov also noted that although there was accurate coverage of the weekend's events in the international media, the Russian media had ignored the marches and resulting arrests of leading political figures or had distorted their reporting. Moscow television juxtaposed a rally of about five thousand members of the pro-Kremlin Nashi group near Red Square releasing white balloons to show their support for Putin with the gathering of "radicals" in the north of the city. The media added to Other Russia's/SPS bad press by interviewing drivers angered by the disruptions caused in Moscow's car-stuffed city center by the Other Russia meeting.

Comment

18. (SBU) The November 24 meeting seemed likely to follow the emerging pattern set by the most recent set of Other Russia rallies. The city had given permission to the demonstrators to meet in central Moscow, but not to march. The meeting itself went off without incident, but when an effort was made to turn the meeting into an unauthorized march the police and special forces troops cracked down. No doubt contributing to the five-day sentence that Kasparov received was his body guards' and Other Russia demonstrators' active resistance to attempts to detain him. Video tapes show one presumed Other Russia activist strangling an OMON troop and Ekho Moskvyy, which offered bulletins during the course of Saturday's events, noted that Kasparov's bodyguards had "fought off" the first efforts to arrest Kasparov after the march to the CEC began. That said, the police seem to have overreacted to the threat posed by the few demonstrators determined to defy the ban, and Kasparov's treatment once detained --the failure to allow him access to his counsel until just minutes before his trial-- was a clear violation of his rights. The Ambassador

will raise our concerns over the treatment of the protesters
later today with acting Foreign Minister Denisov.
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